Alternative route for Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra

1066. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of pilgrims who visited Kailash-Mansarovar since last two years;

(b) whether Government have made any request to the Chinese Government for opening an alternative route for the Yatra through Ladakh, which would be shorter and more convenient to the Indian pilgrims; and

(c) if so, the details of response received from Chinese counterpart so far and the details of the steps taken by Government for opening of an alternative route for Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) 529 pilgrims performed the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra in 2005, while 592 pilgrims undertook the Yatra in 2006.

(b) and (c) Government have proposed to the Chinese side, the opening of an alternative route to Kailash-Mansarovar through Demchok in Jammu and Kashmir. During the visit of the Chinese President Hu Jintao to India in November last year, the two sides agreed to explore the possibility of opening an additional route, for the Yatra.

PoWs of 1965 and 1971 in Pakistani jails

1067. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indian prisoners who were taken as prisoners during Indo-Pak wars in 1965 and 1971 and are still languishing in Pakistani jails;

(b) whether during his visit to Islamabad in January, 2007 he *inter-alia* discussed with President of Pakistan regarding expeditious release of such PoWs who have completed their prison terms; and

(c) if so, the details of such talks/decision held/taken by both sides for the release of prisoners as well as to ensure that human treatment is accorded to prisoners in jails?